

Statement of
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Chairman Costello, Ranking Member Petri and members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Aviation, thank you for inviting me to participate in this hearing on aviation and airport holiday travel preparations. I am Krys T. Bart, A.A.E., the President and CEO of the Reno-Tahoe International Airport. I am also the current Chair of the American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE). AAAE is the world's largest professional organization representing the men and women who manage primary, commercial service, reliever and general aviation airports.

The Reno-Tahoe International Airport is the 60th busiest commercial airport in the nation offering approximately 180 daily commercial flights. It serves as the gateway to the spectacular Reno-Tahoe region – a vacation paradise and growing business center. In 2006, Reno-Tahoe was ranked as one of the most efficient airports in North America, and we pride ourselves on offering leading edge customer service.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to commend you, Ranking Member Petri, Chairman Oberstar and Ranking Member Mica for all of the good work that you did on H.R. 2881, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2007. Airports are particularly grateful that the four-year Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorization bill would raise the Passenger Facility Charge (PFC) cap from \$4.50 to \$7.00 and authorize a total of \$15.8 billion for the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) during the next four years.

Both funding provisions would help airports build the infrastructure they need to accommodate increasing passenger levels and the spikes that occur during the busy holiday travel season. Increased funding for airport infrastructure projects coupled with

the transition to the Next Generation Air Transportation System will go a long way toward helping reduce delays and passenger complaints.

Airport executives realize that increased funding and improving the air traffic control system are not enough to address the problems related to commercial air service and the rise in passenger complaints. That is why my colleagues and I at airports around the country are committed to helping passengers by providing top-notch customer service and by helping airlines and federal agencies carry out their vast responsibilities. My testimony will discuss some of the challenges that airports and passengers face today and describe some of the actions that airports are taking in the long-and short-term to prepare for the coming holiday travel season and for the future.

Increasing Passenger Levels, Airline Delays and Passenger Complaints

Increasing Passenger Levels: As you know from the numerous hearings that this subcommittee has held this year, the FAA is predicting that the number of passenger enplanements will increase from approximately 740 million in 2006 to more than one billion in 2015. Airports need to be able to prepare for a major influx of passengers in the next several years and the increased passenger levels that occur during the busy holiday travel season.

Like other airports around the country, we are experiencing strong passenger and cargo growth at the Reno-Tahoe International Airport. Last year, we had a 12% growth in cargo and approximately 2.5 million enplanements. That's about 14,000 passengers arriving and departing every day. The FAA is predicting that our passenger enplanements will increase from approximately 2.6 million in 2007 to more than 3.2 million by 2015 – a 23% increase.

Increasing Airline Delays: Like the passengers using our facilities, airport executives are increasingly concerned about the dramatic rise in flight delays. According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), more than 24.3% of all flights between January and September of this year arrived at their gates 15 minutes or more after their scheduled arrival time. That's 183,000 more flight delays this year than the number of delays that occurred during the same nine-month period in 2006. And it's almost 375,000 more than the number of delays that occurred between January and September in 2000 when one in four flights was delayed, cancelled or diverted.

Unfortunately, flight delays and cancellations traditionally peak in December when people are often traveling for the holidays. Last December, almost 26% of all flights or more than 157,000 – were delayed, and more than 19,000 flights were cancelled or diverted. (These figures do not include any additional time air carriers have added to flight schedules to account for delays.)

Increasing Passenger Complaints: It should not be surprising that flight delays and cancellations are driving most passenger complaints. According to the Department of Transportation, the top source of passenger complaints between January and September

of this year was flight delays, cancellations and misconnections. Approximately 34% of all passenger complaints during that timeframe were due to flight delays, cancellations and misconnections. Passenger complaints about flight delays are skyrocketing. Passengers filed more than twice as many complaints about flight delays, cancellations and misconnections during that same nine-month period in 2006.

Airports are Taking Numerous Steps to Help Passengers During the Holiday Season

Increasing Capacity to Help Reduce Delays and Passenger Complaints: With the continued help from this committee, airports are increasing capacity throughout the year to help mitigate airline delays and passenger complaints. Reno-Tahoe International Airport's runways and taxiways offer some of the best infrastructure on the west coast. In fact, we serve as the diversionary airport for the Bay Area airports. When there is bad weather in Northern California, we accept flights bound for San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose and Sacramento.

At Reno-Tahoe, our capacity issues revolve around a terminal building that is 50-years-old, and our focus is on improving the passenger experience. We are in the beginning stages of a baggage handling project that will speed up passenger check-in while moving Explosive Detection System (EDS) machines out of our lobby and behind the scenes. We are also in the planning stages for expanding our concourses while analyzing the need for an expanded terminal and parking facilities.

When Robert Sturgell, the Acting Administrator for the FAA, testified before this subcommittee last month, he mentioned in his testimony that 13 new runways have opened at Operational Evolution Partnership (OEP) airports since 2000. He pointed out that the new runways have reduced delays at those airports by an average of 5 minutes. Acting Administrator Sturgell also mentioned that additional runways, taxiways and other airfield projects in the works at 8 OEP airports will "decrease average delay per operation by almost 2 minutes...."

Needless to say, these critical capacity-enhancing projects would not be possible without adequate PFC revenue and AIP funding. Airports appreciate the funding provisions contained in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2007, and we also owe this subcommittee a debt of gratitude for raising the PFC cap in 2000 and for increasing AIP funding during consideration of Vision 100 and AIR-21. Without your leadership and commitment to funding airport infrastructure projects, flight delays, cancellations and passenger complaints would be far worse than even today's high levels.

Coordinating with Airlines, TSA and Concessionaires: In addition to adding more capacity to accommodate increasing passenger levels in the longer-term, airports are taking numerous steps in the short-term to help passengers during the upcoming holidays. For instance, airport executives work closely with the airlines, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), concessionaires and other tenants to ensure that all of those entities are prepared for the influx of passengers during the holidays.

The Chicago Department of Aviation offers a prime example of the coordination that takes place behind the scenes long before passengers arrive at O'Hare International and Midway Airports. The Department of Aviation works closely with all of its tenants to ensure both airports are prepared to accommodate increased passenger levels during the holidays. Department representatives also meet with TSA officials to review the agency's staffing plans in an effort to reduce long lines at security checkpoints.

The Des Moines International Airport works with the airlines and the TSA to compile a spreadsheet to highlight daily passenger loads and charter activities during the holiday season. The Metropolitan Airports Authority (MWAA) similarly distributes projected passenger loads at Ronald Reagan Washington National and Dulles International Airports with airport police, authority staff, Travelers Aid and the TSA to assist with their staffing plans. MWAA also shares this information with concessionaires and other tenants to ensure that they have adequate supplies and personnel on hand during the busy holiday travel season.

Providing Helpful Information to Passengers: Airports also use their websites and the media to disseminate helpful information to passengers before they leave their home or office for the airport. Like numerous other airports around the country, the San Jose International Airport informs passengers about roadway changes, the location of its cell phone waiting areas and when to arrive for check-in on busy holiday travel days.

The Lihue Airport in Kauai, Hawaii – where many would like to travel to over the holidays – also uses the media to provide holiday travel information to passengers. Here in Washington, MWAA communicates helpful travel tips to the public two weeks before holiday season. Disseminating this information helps to reduce delays and passenger frustration during the busy holiday season.

Helping Passengers with Parking: Simply finding a place to park at some airports can be particularly challenging during peak travel times. Airports around the country are using a combination of new technology and more personnel to help passengers navigate their parking facilities and to reduce the amount of time it takes them to enter and exit parking facilities during peak travel times. Other airports encourage their customers to take public transportation or seek options other than single-passenger automobiles.

Last year, we installed a Credit Express parking system at the Reno-Tahoe airport that is reducing wait times by allowing customers to use a credit card upon entering one of our parking facilities and to use the same card upon exiting. The new system is fast and easy for customers to use. It has helped to eliminate a large number of cash transactions that previously caused back-ups in parking garage exit lanes during the holidays and other peak travel times.

The nearby Baltimore/Washington International (BWI) Thurgood Marshall Airport is another good example of an airport using technology to reduce parking-related delays. The airport uses SMART Park – an impressive system that includes ultrasonic sensors

above each parking space and electronic signs to efficiently guide customers to open parking spaces. Airport officials augment that technology during the busy travel times by establishing overflow parking facilities and procedures.

During the busy travel season, the Chicago O'Hare International Airport deploys additional staff in economy parking lots to assist and direct travelers to shuttle busses and to the Airport Transit System. The airport also opens additional access points to parking lots to allow for efficient traffic flow. It also monitors its transit system and, if necessary, adds more cars to efficiently move passengers to and from the terminals.

Because of space restrictions or ongoing construction projects, some airports have very limited parking available during the busy holiday season and urge travelers to use other forms of transportation to the airport. The San Antonio International Airport, for instance, pays for announcements on local radio stations to encourage passengers to use taxis or have friends or family drive them to the airport. For those who drive, the airport uses staff to guide customers to various on-site parking facilities.

MWAA uses its website to conveniently update passengers on parking availability at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. The website has real-time information so passengers can determine how many spaces are actually available in their parking facilities. The airport authority also urges travelers to take Metro during the holidays, and it uses its police department to facilitate traffic volume to and from the airport during peak travel times.

Assisting Passengers at Security Checkpoints and Throughout the Terminal: When passengers arrive at the terminal, airport personnel strive to provide them with helpful information to make their experience at the airport as convenient as possible. Although primary responsibility for passenger and baggage screening rests with the TSA, airports routinely help passengers by mitigating congestion and delays at security checkpoints and airline ticket counters. While experienced travelers may not rely on these services, assisting the many holiday travelers who are less familiar with airport facilities helps to reduce wait times for all passengers.

At the Reno-Tahoe International Airport we deploy Passenger Aides from 4:00 a.m. to midnight to help passengers in the terminal, at security checkpoints and at our baggage claim area. Our Passenger Aides wear distinctive uniforms and are easy for travelers to identify. During the holidays, they also wear blinking lights on their uniforms so passengers know just where to go with questions.

Our customers and our community will be pleased to know that they can find more Passenger Aides working in the terminal around the holidays and during peak travel periods. Passenger Aides go through intensive training and coordinate their actions with airline and TSA personnel to ensure they are in the busiest locations at the busiest times to offer the highest level of customer assistance. We take great pride in the commitment and dedication of our Passenger Aides at Reno-Tahoe.

Numerous other airports have similar passenger assistance programs. The Port Columbus International Airport in Ohio, for instance, uses volunteers to operate an additional information kiosk during the holidays to help answer passenger questions. Airport officials also volunteer their own time by helping passengers and assisting with line management in the ticket lobby and at security checkpoints during heavy traffic periods. (The administrative personnel at the Reno-Tahoe International Airport – myself included – are similarly on call to help out during peak travel times.)

Since 2003, the San Diego International Airport has relied on its Checkpoint Passenger Assist (CPA) program to help passengers during the holiday and peak summer travel season. CPAs are students who are 18-years-old or older who assist passengers with the divestment and consolidation of their belongings before and after screening at security checkpoints. They also assist with line management at the airline ticket counters.

The Mineta San Jose International Airport similarly uses its Ambassador Program to provide passengers with customer assistance at security checkpoints, to help them find their way around the terminal and to answer questions about the airport. The Ambassadors are airport employees who volunteer to work extra hours in order to help their customers traveling through the airport during the holidays.

Again, many of these measures focus on airline and security operations, which are not directly under the control of airports. However, they are prime examples of airports going the extra mile in an effort to improve the entire passenger experience from arrival at their home airport to departure at their destination airport.

Registered Traveler Program: A number of airports also use the Registered Traveler (RT) program to reduce wait times and passenger frustration at security checkpoints throughout the year and during peak travel times. The RT program allows TSA to enhance aviation security and improve system efficiency by focusing scarce resources on those individuals who represent the highest risk. The program allows those passengers who enroll in the program and have completed a security threat assessment to take advantage of expedited screening. Thirteen airports currently operate an RT program, and the Denver International Airport is slated to unveil its program early next year.

I am pleased to say that we began operating an RT program at the Reno-Tahoe International Airport in June. Customers who enroll in our “rtGO” program present their personal identification card at the security checkpoint and pass through a separate line that expedites the screening process for all travelers and allows screeners to focus more intensely on potential threats. Although the rtGO program in Reno has only been up and running for less than five months, 500 passengers have already enrolled. We are very excited about this program and are confident that positive results can be replicated at airports across the country.

Passenger Advisory at Security Screening System: In addition to deploying staff to help out at security checkpoints and using the RT system, many airports are using the Passenger Advisory at Security Screening (PASS) system to help expedite passenger

screening throughout the year and during peak travel times. The PASS system, which was developed by AAAE, helps reduce congestion and delays by preparing passengers to properly divest themselves before they pass through security checkpoints.

Each PASS system that AAAE installs contains a one-minute customized video that reminds passengers to remove metal items from their pockets, remove laptop computers from their bags and take other steps before passing through security checkpoints. The video, which is continuously looped on monitors with 42-inch screens, significantly reduces the wait times at security checkpoints and is particularly helpful during the busy holiday season when less experienced travelers use the aviation system.

You can witness the benefits of the PASS system the next time you fly out of Ronald Regan Washington National or Dulles International Airports. AAAE has also installed the system at Newark Liberty International, Boston Logan International and other airports around the country. The PASS system has been so successful that Amtrak is planning to use it at train stations to help educate passengers on new security measures.

Snow Removal Plans: Of course, airports have extensive snow removal plans in place should they be hit with severe winter storms over the holidays. During the winter of 2004-2005, the Reno-Tahoe area received more than 84 inches of snow in a two-week period of historic snowstorms. Since then, we have purchased additional snow removal equipment including a de-icing machine and a combined snow-plow and snow-broom to ensure that we can remain open when winter storms strike again.

As many of you may recall, the Denver International Airport was forced to temporarily close on December 20th last year because a severe blizzard caused white-out conditions. Blowing and drifting snow created drifts up to five feet high and prevented the airport from operating for two days. To help stranded passengers over the holidays, the airport distributed more than 5,000 blankets, 4,000 bottles of water, diapers and baby formula.

The Denver International Airport has spent a great deal of time and money upgrading its snow removal plans to prepare for winter storms this year. The new plan includes enhanced communication and coordination with the FAA and the airlines. The airport has also been upgrading its snow removal equipment and plans to use additional personnel and snow melters to help remove snow as quickly as possible. That's not an easy task considering the fact that the airport ramp consists of 355 acres – the same amount of space as 268 football fields.

When storms cause delays in Denver, Chicago or New York, those delays ripple throughout the entire aviation system. We experience those ripple effects in Reno. Passengers often drive long distances to get to our facility so it is absolutely critical that we get information about potential delays to them as quickly as possible. Toward that goal, airport personnel constantly monitor weather around the county for potential delays in Reno and use press conferences, the airport web site and in the future, text message alerts, to keep passengers notified of impacts on their schedules.

Emergency Contingency Plans: A number of airports have emergency contingency plans in place should long on-board delays occur during the holidays. For instance, BWI carefully monitors airfield activities and coordinates with airlines when an aircraft is delayed for an extended period of time away from the gate. As part of its emergency contingency plan, the airport can make gates available for off-loading passengers. Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport purchased four buses capable of carrying more than 100 passengers from the aircraft to the terminal as well as four sets of "airstairs" to help deplane passengers.

MWAA also has emergency contingency plans in place for Ronald Reagan Washington National and Washington Dulles International Airports. The airport authority coordinates with airlines and provides available gates to deplane passengers when necessary. If a gate is not available, MWAA assigns a remote parking location so ground transportation can be used to transport passengers from the aircraft to the terminal. The airport authority can also use mobile lounges at Dulles to deplane passengers at virtually any location on the airport.

If delays occur during night-time hours at either airport, MWAA provides blankets and pillows, diapers and baby formula to passengers. The airport authority also works to make sure that certain concessions at its airports remain open on a 24-hour basis. Like other airports around the country, we distribute bottles of water at the Reno-Tahoe airport to passengers experiencing long delays.

What the Federal Government Can Do to Help Airports and Passengers During the Holidays and Throughout the Year

Raise the PFC Cap and Increase AIP Funding: Mr. Chairman, Congress can help airports accommodate increasing passenger levels and the spikes that occur during holiday seasons in the future by approving a multi-year FAA reauthorization bill that raises the PFC cap to \$7.00 and authorizes \$15.8 billion for AIP funding. Due to the leadership on this subcommittee, the House of Representative has done its part by passing H.R. 2881, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2007.

Airports are now waiting for the Senate to pass its version of the bill so that lawmakers can iron out their differences and send an FAA reauthorization bill to the President's desk. As everyone on this panel knows, time is quickly running out. The latest continuing resolution that Congress approved as part of the Fiscal Year 2008 Department of Defense Appropriations bill, allows the FAA and other federal agencies to continue to operate through December 14th.

Although the continuing resolution includes temporary AIP funding, the FAA does not plan to begin actually distributing those funds anytime soon in part because the agency maintains that it would "require an extension of at least six months to administer the grant program...." With the December 14th deadline fast approaching, we hope that you will do everything you can to work with colleagues in the Senate send a multi-year FAA reauthorization to the President's desk.

It is critical that Congress approve a multi-year FAA reauthorization before the current extension expires on December 14th. Delays in distributing AIP funding would impact airports of all sizes and be particularly hard on small airports that rely on federal funds and those airports with short construction cycles. Many large airports would also be adversely affected because they count on AIP funds gained through Letters of Intent to build capacity-enhancing projects. Moreover, every month without the PFC increase proposed in the House bill would cost airports approximately \$100 million.

Provide Adequate Resources for Passenger and Baggage Screening: I realize that this subcommittee does not have jurisdiction over aviation security issues. However, I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to highlight aviation security and the impact that the federal government's current security apparatus has on travelers at our nation's airports. Some of the most frustrating experiences passengers face when they work their way from the airport entrance to the boarding gate are security-related.

Those frustrations – from having to carry checked baggage to machines located in crowded lobbies to waiting in long lines at security checkpoints – will likely increase during the holiday travel season and beyond unless the federal government provides meaningful short- and long-term solutions. In the short-term, airports encourage Congress to provide adequate resources for aviation security.

TSA must also do a better job of deploying those resources effectively while working to become more responsive and innovative in its approach to passenger and baggage screening. Additionally, Congress and the Administration must do more to provide the staffing resources in the form of U.S. Customs and Border Protection personnel to accommodate the growing influx of international passengers at gateway airports.

On the staffing front, recent adjustments to the TSA screener allocation model have resulted in staffing shortages at some of the nation's busiest airports including those in Atlanta and Denver. Unfortunately, passengers at those airports routinely experience wait times of 30 minutes to nearly one hour. At one point last December passengers at the Denver International Airport actually waited in line for two and a half hours.

At other airports, screening checkpoints – that in some instances were built with TSA's direct involvement – are left un-staffed by TSA because of budget constraints causing long lines at security checkpoints. TSA cannot let budget concerns undermine commitments that the agency has made to staff necessary screening checkpoints.

As I mentioned previously, airports often assist TSA with the management of its screening checkpoint lines. The Denver International Airport is spending more than \$1 million per year to help improve the passenger screening process. However, it is clear that the problem is bigger in many locations than any additional staff or queue management assistance can completely mitigate. The federal government must recognize and fulfill its obligations under the law to effectively screen all passengers and baggage

and it should do so in a way that does not unduly inconvenience air travelers during the holidays and throughout the year.

In the long-term, the goal must be to move from today's labor intensive security model to a smarter, more advanced approach through the deployment of improved technology. The installation of in-line EDS in the nation's airports is one example of how technology can be deployed to enhance security, improve efficiency and dramatically reduce TSA personnel requirements.

I would like to thank the members of the subcommittee for the leadership role you have taken in encouraging investments in technology, particularly with regard to in-line EDS systems in airports. The progress that has been made to this point has come in no small part thanks to your efforts to establish the Aviation Security Capital Fund in Vision 100.

Airport executives are pleased that the bill to implement the 9/11 Commission recommendations, which Congress approved earlier this year, provides continued funding for in-line EDS systems and revitalizes the Letter of Intent process. I urge members of this committee to continue to do everything you can to ensure that TSA and the Office of Management and Budget follow the requirements of the 9/11 law and issue multi-year agreements to airports to begin construction on these critical projects.

Conclusion

Chairman Costello, Ranking Member Petri, members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Aviation, thank you again for inviting me to participate in this hearing on aviation and airport holiday travel preparations. Airport executives around the country look forward to continuing to work with Congress, the Administration, airlines and other airport tenants to ensure that we are prepared for upcoming holiday travel season.